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VINDICATION

OF THE
16 London Protestant Ministers of
Subscribing Ministers,

In Answer to a late PAPER, Entitled, An

Apocryphical Account, &c.

CONTAINING,

- I. Some Reasons for Declaring their Faith at this Critical Juncture.
- II. Why in other than express Scripture Words, and particularly in those Words contained in the First Article of the CHURCH of ENGLAND, and the Answers to the Fifth and Sixth Questions of the ASSEMBLIES CATECHISM.
- III. An Account of their not Signing the *Advices* of the other Side, but sending distinct Ones of their Own.
- IV. Some Observations upon the Declaration of Faith made by those Brethren, and their Reasons for not Signing the forementioned *Article* and *Answers*.

Published by Agreement of several of the Ministers of the three Denominations who Subscrib'd the Declaration.

L O N D O N:

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INDICATION

ON THE

Subscribing Ministers

In answer to a late PAPER, Entitled, An

Account of the

COMMITTEE

I. Some Reasons for Desiring that the said Committee

II. Why it is necessary that the said Committee should be



III. An Account of the

IV. Some Observations upon the

V. Some Observations upon the

VI. Some Observations upon the

VII. Some Observations upon the

VIII. Some Observations upon the



VINDICATION
OF THE

Subscribing Ministers

In ANSWER to the

Authentick Account, &c.



THE World is not ignorant of the present *unhappy Divisions* among the *LONDON Ministers*, and the occasion of them. We should have greatly rejoyc'd, if such an open Rupture might have been prevented, and the Notice of it conceal'd from the Publick. But since *our Brethren* on the other Side have given the World Their *AUTHENTICK Account, &c.* We have been *necessitated* in Justice to ourselves to publish the *Reasons* of our *Conduct*, which we shall do in the following Order.

- I. ASSIGN REASONS for declaring *our Faith* at this *critical Juncture*.
- II. WHY in other than *express Scripture Words*, and particularly in *those Words* contain'd in the *First Article* of the CHURCH of ENGLAND, and the Answers to the *Fifth* and *Sixth* Questions of the ASSEMBLIES Catechism.
- III. ACCOUNT for our *not Signing* their *Advices*, but sending distinct Ones of our Own. And,
- IV. MAKE some *Observations* on the Declaration of their Faith, and on their *Reasons* for not Signing *Ours*.

I. REASONS for declaring our Faith at this *Critical Juncture*.

IT is very evident this is a Season wherein the *Doctrine* of the Ever-blessed TRINITY, and especially the GODHEAD of OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST and of the HOLY SPIRIT is contested by some and *openly deny'd* by others.

SOME of US had but too *Just Ground* to suspect that one or more of the *Ministers*, whose Case was under our Consideration were gone into these Errors. The People of EXON who were dissatisfy'd with them, and were expecting our *Advices*, signify'd, they could have but little *Regard* to any that should come from *Those*, who would not *first* make a *Declaration* of their *own Faith* in this great Doctrine.

IT could not be obtain'd in one of our first Meetings, That there should be any DECLARATION inserted in the *Advices* to be sent down to them. The Loss of this Question, caus'd a great Noise in this CITY, gave *great Uneasiness* to the Minds of many serious People, made some with-

out.

out-Doors, of *Arian Principles*, to triumph as if the Day were their own; and as if the Major Part of the *LONDON Ministers* did favour their Scheme. And even before this Time, in some of their printed Pamphlets * they insinuated, That *many among the Dissenters, Teachers, as well as People*, were with them in their Sentiments. Some Papers put forth by those of the *Established Church* in Defence of the *Sacred TRINITY*, had openly charg'd the *Dissenters* as being tainted with the contrary Errors. We had Reason to believe, that it was expected by those of the *Church of England*, that we should clear Ourselves of such Imputations by giving some *publick Testimony* of our continuing in the *Common Faith*.

IN such Circumstances we think we should not have been faithful *Stewards of the Mysteries of Christ*, nor have shewn either our *Love* for the Truth or a *due Regard* to our own Reputation and Usefulness, or a *just Concern* for the Preservation of some, and the Satisfaction of others who attend on our Ministry, if we had not made a *free and open DECLARATION* of our Faith.

II. REASONS for making the DECLARATION of our FAITH in other than *express Scripture Words*, and particularly in those Words contain'd in the *first Article* of the *Church of ENGLAND*, and in the *Answer* to the *fifth* and *sixth Questions* of the *Assemblies Catechism*.

§. I. WE

* *Emlyn's Narrative*, p. 3, 4. See also *Answer to Mr. Trosse's Arguments*.

§. 1. WE are as free as any to own, That the *sacred Scriptures* are the *only* and *perfect* Rule of Faith, and all *Creeds, Catechisms, Summaries of Religion, &c.* of *Human* Composure, are to be taken from and examin'd by them, and are to be receiv'd no farther than they are found agreeable to them.

WE believe all the great Articles of Faith are so express'd in *Scripture*, that Persons of *honest* and *serious* Minds, who *diligently* read them, may understand the true Sense and Meaning of the *Holy Ghost* by them, and that *better* Words could not be chosen to answer that which was *his* Design in the Revelation.

BUT yet we cannot say, That He has *always* may Use of the *plainest* Words, that he *possibly* could have done to *prevent* the Cavils and Evasions of Men of *corrupt* Minds. Doctrines are so express'd and attended with that Light and Evidence there, as is *sufficient* to convince and satisfy the Mind without *necessitating* Mens Belief, GOD having in his Wisdom seen fit to leave Room for the Tryal and Manifestation of their *Integrity* and *Impartiality*.

IF never any had risen up in the Christian Church *perverting* the Words of *Scripture* to a Sense *directly* *contrary* to that of the *Holy Ghost*, it might not then have been so *necessary* to have made use of other Words in declaring *Articles* of Faith. But since the Sense of *Scripture* is *Scripture*; for the better *detecting* and *opposing* of these *Heresies*, and for the *satisfying* People how we understand the Words of *Scripture* it has often been found *necessary* to make use of other *Expressions*: Because that barely to repeat the Words of *Scripture*, is not to explain the *Sense* of them, or to *satisfy* Others how we understand them.

ALL who bare the Name of *Christians* profess to believe the *Scriptures*, and are ready to subscribe the *Letter* of 'em: But when *contrary Interpretations* are given of the same Places, a Person's bare subscribing of the *Words* can be no *Discrimination*. And when many shall have apostatized from the Faith, it cannot be a *sufficient Evidence*, that a Person does not hold the *like Errors*, while they that do hold them will subscribe the *bare Words* of Scripture as well as himself. For this Reason the Church of God has found it necessary to draw up and publish the *Confessions* of their Faith in other *Terms* than those of *Scripture*; not as if they designed these to be the *Standard* of Truth and Error, or that none could be found in the Faith that did not subscribe those *individual Words*; but as a *Declaration* what the *Compilers* took to be the *Sense* and *Meaning* of the *Holy Ghost* touching those *Articles*. And if they truly express *his Sense*, tho' the Words are not of *Divine Inspiration* (nor indeed are the *Words* of any *Scripture Translation* so) yet the *Doctrine* contained in them, is, and the *contrary* to it must be accounted *dangerous Error*.

It will be allowed possible for *wise* and *good* Men to express these *Articles* of Faith with so much *Clearness* and *Plainness*, as that *others* may not be able to do it *more* to their *particular Satisfaction* in Words of their own *obusing*: And in such a Case, what should hinder their subscribing them *as freely* as if they themselves had *originally framed* them?

AND it deserves Consideration, That those who are *so strict* for declaring their Faith only in *Scripture Terms*, are forward enough, and find it *necessary* at other Times to make use of *different Expressions*

Expressions, when they endeavour to propagate a Scheme that (as we conceive) has neither in *Words* nor *Sense* any Foundation in the Scriptures; which cannot but give to Many, Ground of *Suspicion* that their Plea in this Case is used as a Means to cover their *real* Sentiments at a Season when they find it not so convenient publicly to own them. We think *They* act the most sincere and becoming Part both as Christians and Ministers, who freely declare to their Hearers what their real Sentiments are in these great Points, upon their desiring it of them in an humble and respectful manner: It seems strange to us, that any without being desir'd, should in some Companies be very free in expressing their Sentiments upon these Matters; and yet live in Disguise, and be always upon the Reserve with those who are most concern'd to know what their real Faith is.

§. 2. We have chosen to make the Declaration of our Faith in the Words of the first Article of the Church of ENGLAND and the Answers to the fifth and sixth Questions of the Assemblies Catechism, for the following Reasons.

THEY were drawn up by Men of great Learning and Piety, some of them glorious Instruments in the REFORMATION; All of them hearty Friends of reformed CHRISTIANITY, in Opposition to POPERY. The DECLARATION in both its Parts, is what we take to be intirely agreeable to the Holy Scriptures, and to the Confessions of all the Reformed Churches.

WE are oblig'd to subscribe the Article, as the Condition of our enjoying the Benefit of the legal Toleration; and therefore were willing to satisfy the GOVERNMENT, that as we did not prevaricate in

in our first Subscription, so we continue still of the same Mind.

THE *Answers* to the *Questions*, contain the very same Doctrine, and almost in the same Words. They have been look'd upon as a Testimony of our Agreement with the *Established Church*, and with the Rest of the *Reformed Churches* in this grand Article; and they are what our People are best acquainted with, and which we usually teach, and recommend to them and their Children; and therefore are doubtless most likely to give them Satisfaction concerning the Soundness of our Faith. And because an Uniformity as to Words in our Declaration, must have its Use and Advantages; We had Reason to hope, these would be as unexceptionable as any, and that we should more easily come into an Agreement about them, than in any others we could have fix'd upon, tho' drawn up by Ourselves. Besides, we were not so fond of our own Compositions, as to substitute them in the Room of others, which have been so generally, and so long approv'd.

III. REASONS for not Signing the *AdVICES* of the Brethren on t'other Side, but sending distinct Ones of our Own.

We must here observe to the Reader, That we were prevented from concurring with them in considering and passing their *AdVICES* during the time we were Signing our Declaration, which we thought Ourselves oblig'd to, as the first Step that ought to be taken. Some Messages pass'd, in one of which we signify'd our Readiness to return to them after we had finish'd the important *Affair* we were about; but they in this Interval went on and finish'd some of them, and afterwards

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signify'd

signify'd their Resolution not to admit of any Alteration in those which they had pass'd. And granting we had deliberated with them, if upon Debate all these Advices must have pass'd as ~~here~~ they stand, we could not with Satisfaction of Mind have set our Hands to them.

As to the *Preliminary Clauses*, they are as they were sent down from the Committee of the *Three Denominations*, and were owing to some of the *Brethren* on our Side. So far are we from framing Objections against *them*, that we had good Right to make use of them as our Own.

As to the *ADVICES*, We take several of them to be too *general* and *obscure*; not sufficiently accommodated to the Case of those for whom they were *primarily* and *especially* design'd. They seem to carry too visible a *Partiality* in Favour of those, whom we think to have given *just Ground* of Discontent. The *People* are very strictly *ty'd up*, but their *Ministers* are not advis'd to be so *free* and *open* in declaring their Faith, and in giving that *Satisfaction* to their People, which we think the *Duty* of their Office, and what the mutual *Peace* and *Comfort* of those in such a Relation does require.

It is insisted on (tho' it be only in the Case of seeking Advice with Relation to Ministers that are no farther charg'd than with a *Suspicion* of holding false Doctrine) that such Evidence be produc'd as is requir'd in Courts of *Judicature*. Now, if there must be *Two* or more *Witnesses* to the *same* Matter of Fact on which such a *Suspicion* is grounded, it may not be possible in some Instances to produce it. For Attempts may be made to corrupt several *single Persons* one after another. Must these single Persons remain under their Dissatisfaction, and be oblig'd to attend such a
Ministry

Ministry for want of *two Witnesses*? And even in such a Case where they can be produc'd, it may not be always *proper* or *safe* to do it. Let it be also consider'd that a Man suspected of dangerous Error, if he be not *really* Guilty, can if he *pleases* easily clear himself, whereas this is not *always* in the Power of Persons charged with Crimes of a Civil Nature. If therefore Application be *first* made to the Person suspected by him that is dissatisfy'd and he refuse to clear himself, we see no Reason why others may not hear what that *single Person* has to say, and give their *Advice* upon it.

In their *fourth Rule* or Head of Advice, They judge that a Person is *then only* to be *conjur'd*, as not holding the Faith necessary to Salvation, *when it appears that he contradicts or refuses to own the plain and express DECLARATIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE in what is there made necessary to be believ'd and in Matters there solely revealed.* From hence it seems, that in Points that are *not* of *sole* Revelation tho' necessary to Salvation, Persons may *contradict*, or refuse to own the *plain and express* Declarations of Scripture about them, without being liable to *Censure*, and what the Consequence of this will be let every one judge. We must again observe that when there is a Dissatisfaction given it is reasonable to suppose that it did not arise from the bare mentioning of the *Words* of Scripture, but from a *false Interpretation* of them, and the advancing of Notions which the Person apprehended to be *contrary* to their plain *Sense*; and yet according to this *Rule* if the accused Party do's but adhere to the *Words* of Scripture, tho' he shall *refuse* to acquaint you how he *understands* them and will not retract the Notions that gave Offence, he

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must

must not be censur'd or condemned. . . At this Rate a Man may privately or publicly propagate what erroneous Opinions he pleases, and if called to give an Account of his Faith, he may refuse to give that Account in any other than *Scripture Phrases*, and if he do, it must notwithstanding be reckon'd *satisfactory* and he be free of all *Censure*.

We know not what they mean by *Human Decisions* but this we conclude, that Persons tho' denying the *Authority* of Men in Matters of Faith, may yet judge some *Propositions* contained in Words of their forming, to express the Mind of God as truly as if deliver'd in *Scripture Terms*; and then to reject such *Propositions* is not merely to reject a *Human Form* but to reject *Divine Truth*. The Scripture in these great Articles must have a *determinate Sense* not various, much less *contradictory*. If People shall deny what upon the *strongest Grounds*, I am bound to believe is the *real and determinate Sense* of the *Holy Ghost*, tho' they still make use of the *Words* of Scripture, I cannot but conclude them to have *renounc'd* the Faith; and if my *declaring* this be called a *censuring* and *condemning* them I cannot help it: For so long as they shall hold these Words in a *contradictory Sense*, it is certain they or I must be in a dangerous Error; and whilst upon the foremention'd Grounds, I am fully perswaded of my being in the *Right*, I cannot forbear concluding them to be in the *Wrong*.

We cannot but Remark that our *Brethren* in their *second Rule* speak only of Persons charged with not holding the Christian Faith, or *propagating* Opinions *inconsistent* with it, but when they come in *this Rule* (*viz. the fourth*) to give *Advice* about a *publick Hearing* and *Censure*, they

they confine themselves to the Case of those who do not hold the Faith *necessary* to Salvation. Here we inquire whether no Doctrines are to be allow'd *Articles* of Faith but such as the *plain and express Declarations* of Scripture make *necessary* to be believ'd to Salvation? May we not be fully satisfy'd there are *some Doctrines* of great Importance and Influence in Religion, and likewise *some Errors*, of a dangerous Tendency and yet we will not venture to say that either the Belief of the one is *absolutely necessary* to Salvation or the holding of the other *certainly destructive*. And yet in this Case may not they who *expressly deny* the one or hold the other be *censur'd* as those who do not hold *intire* Christian Faith, but maintain Opinions that are *inconsistent* with it?

If *just Consequences* of Scripture be not allow'd of in Learning *Articles* of Faith then the Sadduces were innocent in not believing the Doctrine of the RESURRECTION when our SAVIOUR only prov'd it by a Deduction of *Consequences* from GOD's being called the GOD of Abraham, &c. Was not this an *Article* of Faith in the Jewish Church when they had no more of the Divine Revelation than what was contained in the Writing of Moses? How can we by any other than Scripture *Consequences* prove that *Womens Right* to the Lord's-Supper, and the Observation of the *Christian Sabbath*, &c. are *Matters of Faith*? Where in Scripture are these commanded in so many *express Words*? And yet if they have not a *Foundation* there, they can't be said to be of *Divine Institution* but are only the *mere Inventions* of Men.

In their *fifth Rule*, they advise that, *all be allow'd by common consent to support their own Sense*
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of Scripture upon proper Occasions with Reasons as appear to them convincing, but they do not acquaint us what way this is to be done, whether only in Private Conversation, Writing or Printing, we would know whether they allow it to be done also in the Pulpit; For if this last be granted, then both Trinitarians and Antitrinitarians must be permitted by common Consent to preach one for another and to give their different and even contradictory Interpretations tho' it be in Matters of the greatest Consequence, provided it be done with Sobriety and Charity, and who does not see the Tendency this must have to confound the Minds of People and to run them into such uncertainties as at length they shall not know what they are to believe?

We are at a Loss to know what they mean by the following obscure Clause in their Advices to a plain People [*We desire to secure the Evidence arising from Scripture Consequences*] But when they add, *That no Man should be charg'd with holding those Consequences of his Opinion which he expressly disclaims*; we observe, That tho' we should be always very tender and sparing of Mens Persons, yet this ought not to bar us from Judging freely of the Doctrines and Opinions they hold, and the dangerous Consequences that follow upon them. We need not upon the Account of their disclaiming them, decline, for that Reason, to represent them in their true Colours; and their not seeing these Consequences, does not alter their Nature and Influence, nor leave Men wholly excus'd. Besides, the setting these in a clear and proper Light, is one Means to convince them, and bring them to disclaim the Doctrines from whence they flow.

WE shall only observe upon the last Clause of the *sixth Rule*, That they seem to make no *Distinction* at all between Persons that are *Sound* in the Faith, and those that are *not so*. They leave no *Power* in a Christian Church to *censure* and *disown* an *unsound Member*; nor think it *Matter of Blame* in another Church, if they shall *receive* him, tho' he give no *Signs of Repentance*; but continue *obstinate* in his *Error*: By this Means they abandon *all Discipline* in the Church, so far as it relates to the Sin of *Heresy*.

In their *Seventh Rule*, They advise to insist most upon those Things in which Christians are generally agreed.

If this be design'd to restrain Men from *insisting much* upon the *Doctrine* of the TRINITY in Opposition to the *new Scheme*, we don't see it is so fram'd as to reach its End. For notwithstanding the suppos'd *Increase* of those in that *Error*, it may be said, that *Christians* still are generally agreed in the *contrary Scheme*. If this be a good Rule of Advice, and the *Antitrinitarians* had follow'd it, we should have heard little of their *Notions*.

As to what they add, of *insisting more sparingly*, and with *great Modesty*, and *Charity* on those, in which good Men do, or may differ, it is difficult for us to know, whom they mean by good Men. For if their *Charity* be so *extensive*, that all Persons who are but of *sober Life*, and do but own the *bare Words* of Scripture, pass with them for good Men, (tho' they err never so grossly in the *Interpretation* of them) we must insist *very sparingly*, on most of the *great Truths* of the Gospel, For good Men, according to this *Notion* of 'em, have differ'd about these Things;
and

and how much farther they may differ, who can tell? Certainly, the Nature and Importance of particular Doctrines, the Stress the Scriptures lay upon them, are fitter to give us Direction what chiefly to insist on, than the different Sentiment, of those we may arbitrarily call good Men, or who are really so.

AFTER the Names of those who set their Hands to these *Advices*, they add, ' There are several of our Brethren consenting with us in these *Advices*, who desire we would signify so much to the World, tho' they have not here subscribed their Names.

Who these are, we are not very curious to inquire, and leave it to others to conjecture, why their Names have been conceal'd; but since they themselves have not seen fit, to publish them, nor permit their Brethren to do it for them, it is but an odd Notification, and we see not how it can answer any valuable End.

IV. Some OBSERVATIONS upon their DECLARATION of Faith, and the REASONS they give for not signing ours.

WE shall pass this Letter to Exeter, leaving the Judicious to think of that as they shall see Cause, and content ourselves in making the following Observations upon their Declaration, which is express'd in these Words:

' WE freely declare, That we utterly disown the Arian Doctrine, and sincerely believe the Doctrine of the Blessed TRINITY, and the proper Divinity of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, which we

we apprehend to be clearly reveal'd in the Holy Scriptures; but are far from condemning any who appear to be with us in the Main, tho' they should chuse not to declare themselves in other than Scriptura Terms; or not in Ours.

It is somewhat strange, that our Brethren should accompany their *Advices* with a Declaration of their Faith, and desire it to be communicated * to those of Exeter, after they had upon a Division carry'd it for not inserting any such Declaration in those *Advices*.

And granting, that those who sign'd the *Advices* were unanimous in the Declaration; (of which we are not so fully assur'd) yet the World will make their Reflections upon finding Ministers more forward to be known by the *Advices* they give to others, than by signing a Declaration of their own Faith.

We think this Declaration of theirs contains no more than what any of those who are gone into the new Scheme may sign: They leave us wholly in the dark what they mean by *Trinity*, and *proper Divinity*; the last of which is an ambiguous Term; for some think, there may be a Distinction of *proper Divinity*, and *proper Deity*. Besides, this Declaration is very defective. All mention of the Deity of the Holy Ghost, and of the Unity of the Three Persons in the Divine Nature being omitted, which we wonder at.

BUT lest they should have gone too far, they do by their *Marginal Note* (in a great Measure

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* See the Letter that went with those *Advices*.

at least) *retract* what they before *declared*. For they have *thought* it did *concern* them to take Notice that the Words *Trinity* and *proper Divinity*, are *human*. Upon this, it must follow, That if any shall not think fit so much as to *own* a *Trinity*, and the *proper Divinity* of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, they must not, according to *their Rules*, be *censur'd* by them. If we understand this Declaration as explain'd by this *Marginal Note*, it can amount to no more than this, *viz.* That tho' they *apprehend* the *Trinity*, and the *proper Divinity* of our Lord *Jesus Christ* to be *clearly* revealed in the *Holy Scriptures*; yet what *their Faith* is concerning *these*, must not be learn'd from the *Words*; and then this is saying *nothing at all* by those Words; For who can tell by this what their *real Faith* is.

WHEN they add, " But are far from condemning any who appear to be with us in the "*Main*, tho' they should chuse not to declare themselves in other than Scripture Terms or not in ours". We are at a loss to know what they reckon the *Main* of this Doctrine. Whether they think Men may differ about the *Unity* of the Divine Nature and the *Equality* of the Son and Holy Spirit with the Father in Power and Glory: Or whether some may assert only a *Trinity of Names*, and others a real *Trinity of God's*, One *Supreme* and two subordinate, and yet all agree in the *Main*?

HOWEVER this is plain, there is something which *our Brethren* esteem the *Main*, and they are to judge when Others *appear* to be with them in this *Main*. Tho' they should declare in Scripture Terms or in Words of their own. Yet if they do not appear to be with our Brethren

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in the *Main*, its then suppos'd they will be liable to *Censure* and *Condemnation*.

OBSERVATIONS upon their Reasons for not signing our Declaration.

HERE we think proper to give their *Reasons* at length in their own Words and as we go along to make some *Observations* upon them.

Their *Preamble* is thus,

PREAMBLE.

THE many *Mistakes* spread abroad concerning this Matter, and the *Prejudices* which we find some have endeavour'd to fix in Peoples Minds against us, and the *ill Use* which the *Enemies* of our common Interest are endeavouring to make of our not Subscribing on the Occasion mention'd, lay a Necessity upon us, to give the World the Reasons of our Conduct; Which are as follow,

OBSERVATION.

IN this *Preamble* it is said that some have endeavour'd to fix *Prejudices* in Peoples Minds, &c. These some being plainly distinguished from the People, the Charge must rest upon the *Ministers*. A Charge they do not deserve, but if our *Brethren* know of any that are guilty of fixing unjust *Prejudices*, and upon a brotherly Application had not receiv'd a reasonable Satisfaction, they should have mentioned them by Name. Such general *Insinuations* only to tend to make the innocent as much suspected as the guilty.

The Brethren's REASONS.

REASON I.

‘ WE could not subscribe the *Paper offered us*,
 ‘ because our doing it *then*, would have been a
 ‘ *manifest Breach of Order*.

‘ The Case stood thus,

‘ ON February 19, 1718-19. the Body of Pro-
 ‘ testant Dissenting Ministers in, and about, Lon-
 ‘ don, were called together, to consider of a
 ‘ Paper, containing *Advices for promoting Peace*,
 ‘ &c. Which Paper was recommended to them
 ‘ by their Committee of Three Denominations; and
 ‘ thereupon, in a very numerous Assembly of
 ‘ Ministers, it was voted and resolved, to pro-
 ‘ ceed in considering it Paragraph by Paragraph;
 ‘ and this without any Division, or any confi-
 ‘ derable Appearance of Hands to the contrary.
 ‘ On February 24, was a second Meeting; at
 ‘ which Time the Names of all present were
 ‘ set down, and then called over one by one;
 ‘ each Denomination being to approve or disap-
 ‘ prove of such as were reputed to belong to
 ‘ them; and Exceptions were allow’d to be made
 ‘ against any, whose Presence with us might
 ‘ be objected to. After this, Matters were de-
 ‘ bated for several Hours, and at last, a *Questi-*
 ‘ *on* was agreed to be put, for the Decision of
 ‘ which a Division was found necessary; and
 ‘ then it was carried by the Majority, that a
 ‘ Declaration concerning the Trinity should not be in-
 ‘ serted in the Paper of *Advices*. But, notwith-
 ‘ standing these Resolutions, several of our Bre-
 ‘ thren, at a Meeting on the 3d of March, re-
 ‘ newed

newed a Debate, to the same Purpose with that, which before was agreed should be laid aside till we had gone through the *Advices*; and would not acquiesce in the Determinations of a *Majority*, even in the *Method of Proceeding*. Instead of this, they withdrew from our Assembly, and went *by themselves*, to subscribe their Names to a certain Roll of Paper, wherein was contain'd (as we were told) the *first Article* of the Church of England, and the 5th and 6th *Answers* in the *Assembly's Catechism*.

THIS Management, we could not but interpret, as having a direct Tendency to overthrow the *Great Rule* necessary to be observed in all *Societies* and *Assemblies*, to prevent their being *tumultuary* and *insignificant*: And to a Violation of this Rule we must impute whatever then happened that was *disorderly*. We also look'd upon this as tending to prevent our future *Assembling* in a *United Body* of the *Three Denominations*; which yet we take to be *useful*, for preserving a mutual *Friendship* among us, and sometimes *necessary* for our *common Interest*.

WE took it to be yet a further Breach of Order, That, after our Brethren shew'd they were resolved to act contrary to the former Agreement of the *Majority*, they would not so much as allow us the proper Question should be put, *Whether we should proceed, or not proceed?* Before any other Matter was entered upon.

BUT that which carried the Breach of Order to such an Height as to make an unhappy Difference, was, Their *withdrawing* and *subscribing* as abovemention'd.

OUR Brethren being thus separated from us, leaving the *Moderator* in the Chair, and
us

us to act as we thought fit; we then went on with our *Advices* according to Agreement, accounting ourselves properly *The Body*, and not thinking ourselves at all concerned with what our Brethren were doing, out of *Place*, *Time*, and *Order*.

OBSERVATION.

IN some Parts of this *Account* we are sorry to say, There is some *Misrepresentation* of *Facts*. We did not so much as attempt to get the same *Question* put to the *Vote* (as is here insinuated) which was lost the Week before. That *Question* on the 24th of *February*, was, Whether there should be any *Declaration* of our Faith in the *Blessed Trinity* inserted in some Part of their *Advices*. The *Question* which at our *Meeting* on the 3d of *March* we endeavour'd to have put, was, Whether we should make a *Declaration* (distinct from the *Advices*, and without Relation had to them) for our own *Vindication*, and the *Satisfaction* of People. We thought this necessary, altho' no such Paper had been pass'd, and sent to the *Exeter* People.

AND when they say, We renew'd a *Debate*, *March* the 3d, to the same Purpose with that, which before was agreed should be laid aside till we had gone through the *Advices*. This insinuates, as if on *February* the 24th it was agreed to make a *Declaration* of Faith after we had gone through the *Advices*, whereas no such *Agreement* was made, nor was it so much as put to the *Vote*. And they themselves own, that it was carry'd by a Majority; That no *Declaration* should be inserted in the Paper of *Advices*. Much was said by some of them against any *Declaration* at all, seeing they had only *Advices* for *Peace*, and not *Matters of Doctrine*.

Doctrine lying before them, and even on this 2d of *March*, several protested against any Declaration whatsoever.

IN this Account here is also a great Complaint of *Breach of Order*; but this cannot be fairly imputed to the moving of our Question. Because 'tis evident, that before this the Order was broke and instead of proceeding immediately to consider the *Advices* Paragraph by Paragraph, as agreed in a former Meeting, a Debate arose and a Charge was brought against a Reverend Brother, for having, as they say, at their last Meeting express'd himself in these Words: *You that are for the Doctrine of the Trinity, are desir'd to stay below; and you that are against it to go up into the Gallery.* Whereas, he express'd himself in these: *You that are for DECLARING your Faith concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity, if any are above, you are desired to come down; and those of you that are not for DECLARING, are desired to go up.* Upon this Complaint, and a Demand of Satisfaction, he repeating the Words he deliver'd, and particularly, that he utter'd the Word *DECLARE*; and shewing how *unlikely* in Reason it was, he should intend what they charg'd him with, and seriously *Disclaiming* that Intention, it was unanimously carry'd, That he had given *intire Satisfaction*: And even he who laid the Charge, did upon this acknowledge, he did use the Word *Declare*; but when calling to them again, he omitted it: And upon this, an Order pass'd, That for the future no Person be censur'd before he be call'd to explain himself.

SINCE it appears from what thus pass'd, that our Brethren did not immediately proceed to read the *Advices*, but in order to wipe off what they complain'd of as an *Aspersion* upon 'em, did themselves

see

see it *reasonable* to depart from the foremen-
tioned Order, they had *no reason* to except a-
gainst us as doing it, by proposing a *Declaration*
of our Faith, as a more *effectual* Means to vin-
dicate both *themselves* and us.

If this was a Breach of Order, the Matter oc-
casioning it was of much greater Importance than
the *meer* keeping to Order, or than that Instance
in which *themselves* had departed from it. Besides,
it has been *always* judg'd that the *same Assembly*
who made an Order, have it in *their Power* to
change or reverse it when *weighty Occasions* shall
require. But we reckon it a *Hardship* in our Case,
that after *some Hours* Debate, we could not so far
prevail as to have the *Question* put, whether this
Order should be *set aside*, tho' we yielded that *their*
Question of Proceeding should be *first* put, pro-
vided we might be *secured* of putting ours im-
mediately after. The not granting this, ran
us into the *unhappy Necessity* of dividing from
them.

THEY seem to insinuate as if they did not
entirely know the Contents of the Paper we were
Signing; whereas it had been openly told
them; and for a considerable Time before the
Division, Arguments had been urg'd for making
our Declaration in *that Form*; which *very Ar-
guments* they *Themselves* could recollect and re-
fer to *. And in the Time of signing we sig-
nify'd to them what we were doing, and that
if any of *them* were *free* and *willing* they might
concur with us.

AND

† See their III^d Reason.

AND whereas they impute whatever then happen'd disorderly to a Violation of this Rule, we hope they do not mean by it to include *all the tumultuary Indecencies* of that Day, since it is notorious that much of the *Heat and Violence* which broke out, was *before* this Question came under Debate.

THEY who sign'd the Declaration at that Time were *Sixty*; Those who staid behind, according to the *best Account* that could be taken of them, were about *Fifty*. We leave the *World* to judge, (as thinking it not worth our while to contend) who ought to have the Reputation of bearing the Name of the BODY.

It may be farther observ'd, that what they call *Breach of Order*, was not the *only* or *principal* Reason of their declining our Declaration. Some of them openly *protested* against any Declaration *whatsoever*; none of them *expressly* promis'd to join with us in this, tho' we had proceeded with them in the *Advices*; and even since the Separation they might, if they pleas'd, have made it in the *same Words* with us, after the *finishing* of their *Advices*.

II REASON.

WE could not fall in with the Subscription propos'd, because we observed that the *insisting upon it at that Time*, was, to *delay* our considering the Paper of *Advices* before us, and if it might be, to set it *wholly aside*. Some were so free as to make open Acknowledgment of this. And *this* we thought a very good Reason why we could not go about Subscribing; seeing the *Advices* we were summon'd to consider, did not (as we apprehended) deserve to be in such a manner rejected, but

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were

were every Way worthy of the Consideration of such a *Body of Christian Divines*. We were exceedingly pleased with the great and noble End proposed; viz. *A promoting of Peace and Charity among Christians*; without which, had we all Faith, so that we could remove Mountains, (1 Cor. xiii. 2.) we should be nothing. And we thought the Paper before us, which we had heard read once and again, might be made very serviceable to answer the End it proposed, and at the same Time to promote *Truth and Holiness*.

OBSERVATION.

It cannot be allow'd a Reason for their declining our Declaration, that the Subscribing of it would have delay'd the *Advices*; for if they had been free to come into it, we had unanimously and immediately concurr'd with them in proceeding to the *Advices*, and so have prevented that length of Time, that was taken up in debating this Matter.

THIS Declaration we judg'd necessary to give them the greater Weight with those for whom they were chiefly designed. How can that which manifestly conduc'd to this good End, be properly call'd a delaying the Consideration of them, or a Design to set them wholly aside? And whereas they say that some were so free as to make open Acknowledgment of this Design, we own there was one of the Brethren declar'd against that Paper; but if those on the other Side had thought fit to subscribe the Declaration, he and his Brethren had notwithstanding gone along with them in considering of *Advices*.

If the speedy finishing of them was of that Importance that they could not spare an Hour or
Two

Two for signing that Declaration; how could they adjourn the farther Consideration of Advices for a whole Week together?

We are as much pleas'd as they can be with Charity, and every Thing that makes for Peace; but then we are for such a Peace as is consistent with a *seasonable* Declaration of our Faith, and that *necessary* Concern we ought *always* to have, for the *Preservation* of Truth. 'Tis well known that the *particular* Truth contested at this Day, especially at *Exeter*, is the *Deity* of the Son and HOLY GHOST. How these Advices are adapted to preserve and promote this great Truth after the Declaration was refus'd, we profess we cannot see.

III REASON.

III. We did not think fit to subscribe, because we thought no sufficient Reasons were offered, for our subscribing.

We were prest to it, that we might clear ourselves from the *Suspensions* of *Arianism*. But, as we knew no just Ground of Suspicion, much less of any Charge against us, we thought it would ill become us so far to indulge an *unreasonable Jealousy*, as to take a Step of this Nature for removing it; especially since doing so would have been inconsistent with one of the *Advices* which we thought necessary to be given, and which was founded upon an *Apostolical Rule*. And we see no End of such Jealousies: For, if we may be suspected of *Arianism* without having taught any Thing like it, and tho' we have taken all proper Occasions to offer our Reasons against it, and that not only from the *Pulpit* but some of us from the *Press*; We say, if we

‘ must be suspected, merely because we would
 ‘ not subscribe what our Brethren would have
 ‘ us ; why may we not be suspected of *Hypo-*
 ‘ *crisy* after we have done it ? And then pass
 ‘ in the World for *Arians*, and *Cheats* into the
 ‘ Bargain. We never yet thought *Jealousy* and
 ‘ Suspicion to be such good-natured Things as
 ‘ to be satisfied with a few *God Words*.

‘ It was also urged, That to subscribe as
 ‘ they would have us, would give a greater
 ‘ *Weight* to our *Advices*, in Case we should send
 ‘ them to *Exeter*. On the contrary we could not
 ‘ but think, that tho’ they might be regarded
 ‘ by *One Party*, because they would interpret
 ‘ what we did, so as to justify their own Con-
 ‘ duct ; yet they could be taken by the *other*
 ‘ side in no other Sense, but making ourselves
 ‘ a *Party against them*, which we thought would
 ‘ no Way suit with *Advices* intended to make
 ‘ *Peace*, as well as to secure *Truth*. And we
 ‘ had Ground to hope that our *Advices* would
 ‘ be received by all *impartial Men* on Account
 ‘ of what was contain’d in them, as far as they
 ‘ carried Reason and Evidence along with
 ‘ them.

‘ THERE was another Thing offered, That
 ‘ if we subscribed it would prevent the *spread-*
 ‘ *ing of Erroneous Opinions* amongst Those whom
 ‘ our Names might be supposed to Influence ;
 ‘ whereas if we refused, They might be in
 ‘ Danger from a *wrong Apprehension* of our Sen-
 ‘ timents. But we could not think ourselves
 ‘ answerable for any Arguments drawn by o-
 ‘ thers from groundless *Suspensions* concerning
 ‘ us ; nor that those *Suspensions* were a just
 ‘ Reason for our coming into such a Subscrip-
 ‘ tion : We thought we had sufficiently guard-

ed against them in the *Course of our publick Ministrations*; And we are still fully persuaded, that a Faith built upon our Authority is a vain Thing in itself. We think ourselves obliged often to inculcate this Principle upon our Hearers, "That they ought not to form their Judgment in Matters necessary to Salvation, by the private Sentiments of their Ministers, any farther than they are supported by the *Word of God*." And we assure ourselves that a tender and scrupulous Regard for the *Word of God alone*, will never be thought either dangerous, or inconvenient to the *Body of Protestant Dissenters*.

OBSERVATIONS.

Tho' few, if any, do care to own the Charge of *Arianism*, yet it is notorious equivalent *Doctrines* have been and are industriously spread among us. And since the avowed *Antitrinitarians* have not been shy in signifying, both in *Print and Conversation*, as Matter of *Encouragement and Glory*, That their Notions which have been condemned and run down as *Error, Heresy, and Blasphemy*, to many serious and judicious Inquirers, both in the establish'd Church and among the Dissenters, Teachers and People, have appeared to have the *Evidence of Truth* *. And we could not but fear some, in City and Country, had given too much ground for such a Signification: We therefore thought it highly reasonable and even necessary by an open and voluntary Declaration, to wipe off an *Imputation* we could not be easy under, and prevent all *Suspensions* of this kind for the future.

WE think our Hearers may have better Grounds, and be in a better Capacity to judge of our Confessions of Faith than of our Sincerity, and it concerns them more to be satisfy'd of the one than of the other. To suppose that any should be suspected of Hypocrisy and pass for Cheats as well as Ariaks, after a Subscription in such clear and full Words as no honest Ariak will subscribe, is to give way to that unreasonable Jealousy in Themselves which they condemn in others.

THE Subscribers have no fear of this. On the contrary they find they could not have taken a more effectual way to remove Mens Suspicions, and to satisfy every one of the Soundness of their Faith. If indeed any shall in Preaching or Writing, advance such Notions as contradict the Doctrine they have formerly subscribed, others cannot help thinking, that either they were not sincere in the first Subscription, or have chang'd their Minds since that Time.

WE own, that faithful Preaching the Truth, is a proper way to make Error fall before it, and the Signers hope, they are and shall be as careful and conscientious this way as any other; yet they judged this Declaration, in the present Juncture, to be the shortest and clearest way of giving general Satisfaction, not only to their own People, but to those that may not have the Opportunity of hearing them preach, at least when they are upon these Subjects.

THIS also tends to prevent Suspicions and remove any Prejudices or Uneasiness from the Minds of those who are of the same Faith with us, when at any Time they see us come into the Pulpit. These, if entertain'd, will very much hinder the Acceptableness and Success of our Ministry.

AT

At such a Time as *this*, when there is no previous Declaration which the People are well acquainted with, and are own'd to be * great Helps to understand the Mind of God in the Scripture; MINISTERS may preach on the same Subject, and in Appearance the same Doctrine too; yet by a studious avoiding Words that have been long approv'd of as agreeable to the Holy Scriptures, leave their Hearers under great Dissatisfaction.

We have no Reason to alter our Minds as to the Weight this Declaration of our Faith would give to the *Advices*, in Case they should be sent to Exeter. 'Tis strange, a Thing so obvious should not be apprehended by our Brethren, seeing they were to advise those who suspected their own Ministers as deviating from the common Faith in these Points. Was it not reasonable to suppose, they would expect that the Framers of these *Advices* should not be liable to the like Suspicions? Had they not been assur'd of this, they might as well have took Advice from their own suspected Ministers, with whom they were better acquainted, and for whom they once had a very great personal Esteem and Affection. Besides, as has been before observ'd, we were certify'd by Letter, that *Advices* coming from those that would not make a Declaration of their own Faith, would be of little regard or use among them.

As to the Objection, That this would have made us a Party against the other Side, we see no ground for it, unless that Side be suppos'd to be really against the glorious Truth contained

* See their 5th Rule of *Advices*.

in this Declaration. If this were the *real State* of the Case, then the Tendency of these *Advices* must be to keep them *in Communion* with one another, notwithstanding their differing in these *great and fundamental* Articles of Faith; and they who have them *most at Heart*, must entrust their *Souls* with those who would *poison them* with the contrary Errors. What a kind of Peace this would be, and how *such Advices* secure Truth, we are willing the *World* should judge.

THEY insinuate that if they had declar'd, this would *some Way* hinder the Effect of their *Advices* with *impartial Men*; but we cannot see how a Declaration of their Faith would have made those *Advices* contain less in them, or carry *less Reason* and *Evidence* along with them. May not those who believe this *great Doctrine* and declare that their Belief, be as *impartial* as other Men? Are they the only *impartial Persons* who declare *against it*; or chuse to conceal their Belief by refusing to make any *Declaration* at all?

As to what is contain'd in the last Paragraph under this Head, allowing it to have been offer'd as an Argument for subscribing, we cannot but think there is a *wrong Turn* given to it, and complain of it as an *injurious Insinuation*, for they know we are as much against our People's building their Faith upon our *Authority*, and framing their Judgments in Matters of Salvation upon the *private Sentiments* of their *Ministers* as any whatsoever, and are as careful to inculcate this Principle as they. But yet we think our People have a *Right* to know, what our *Sentiments* in these great Articles are; and we ought to take Care, that we do not by conceal-
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ing or obscuring them, expose them to be ensnared by the Sophistry and false Reasoning of Seducers.

We that believe these important Doctrines in the Sense express'd in the Declaration, cannot but be concerned to have our Hearers persevere in this Faith. In order to which we think our declaring in its Place and Season, to be as proper a Means as our Preaching. In the one we no more take them off from the Word of God than in the other; but in both refer them to that as the only Foundation of their Faith. When in our Sermons and Discourses we insist upon these Doctrines, and make use of other than Scripture Words for explaining them, we do thereby signify what we believe to be the Sense of Scripture, and would have them take to be our real Sentiments, and examine them by the Written Word, whether they are so or not. What do we more than this in subscribing the Declaration They refused? May we do the former without Danger of People's building their Faith on our Authority, why may we not as safely do the latter? Especially considering that in the Form it self, we resolve our Faith intirely into the Scriptures.

If a tender and scrupulous Regard to the Word of God alone, should hinder us from doing it in one Case, why not in the other? For then how should we dare to use any other than Scripture Words in preaching, without any manner of Explication; and what would this be other than setting the Ministry wholly aside, and tempting People to imagine that staying at Home and only Reading the Bible is preferable to their Attendance on publick Preaching?

IV REASON.

WE saw no Reason to think; That a Declaration in other Words than those of Scripture, would serve the Cause of Peace and Truth; but rather be the Occasion of greater Confusions and Disorders: We have found it always so in History; And in Reason, the Words of Men appear to us more liable to different Interpretations, than the Words of Scripture: Since all may fairly think themselves more at Liberty, to put their own Sense upon Humane Forms, than upon the Words of the Holy Ghost. And in this Case, what Assurance could we have, that all who subscribed meant precisely the same Sense, any more than if they had made a Declaration in express Words of Scripture?

OBSERVATION.

That to which the Confusions and Disorders in the Church were principally owing, was not merely the declaring their Faith in other than Scripture Words, but their departing at once from its Words and Doctrines too, as in the Arian Controversy the *Oneness* of the one was as much an unscriptural Word as the *Oneness* of the other: But in the latter the Scripture Doctrine was preserv'd, whilst in the former it was lost.

WE can't say what in Reason may appear most likely to others, but to us it seems very possible, that Words of human Composure may more particularly restrain and point out that, which by all just Rules of Interpretation must be the Sense

Sense of the Holy Ghost, than those individual Words he has seen fit to use.

WHAT Evidence is there that the Words of Men are more liable to different Interpretations than the Words of Scripture, seeing many erroneous Persons in all Ages have profess'd, they could conscientiously subscribe these Words, when they could not such human Forms as we are fully satisfy'd contain nothing but the very Doctrine held forth in those Scripture Words? From hence it must follow, that either these erroneous Persons did not act honestly in subscribing the Words of Scripture; or that our Declaration does not contain the true Scripture Doctrine; or else that this Doctrine may be express'd in such Words, as Man cannot so easily evade as the Words of Scripture.

In this Fourth Reason, we are told the Words of Men appear more liable to different Interpretations than the Words of Scripture. But in their Fifth, they are said to restrain that Latitude of Expression in which our great Legislator hath seen fit to deliver his Will to us. How are these Things consistent? If they are more liable to different Interpretations, then they do not restrain this Latitude; but must have at least an equal, if not a greater, Latitude than Scripture Expressions. But if they do restrain it, how are they more liable to different Interpretations? We should be glad to see these Things reconciled.

V REASON.

THE Subscription insisted on, Was beyond even what the Legislature it self requires of us. For the Legislature has thought fit to require

* See Reasons for declaring in other than Scripture Words. p. 6.

only our once subscribing; and this being made a necessary Condition of exercising our Ministry, we should be highly blameable to neglect that Work, by refusing to comply with what is required of us, when we can do it with a safe Conscience. But we have always thought that such *Humane* Declarations of Faith, were far from being eligible on their own Account; since they tend to narrow the Foundations of Christianity, and to restrain that Latitude of Expression in which our great Legislator has seen fit to deliver his Will to us.

OBSEKVATION.

THO' it be acknowledg'd that we for our Parts are requir'd by the Legislature to subscribe but once, yet by those of the Establish'd Church this Subscription must, upon various Occasions, be repeated as a fresh Pledge to the Government of their continuing in the same Faith. If we could do it once with a safe Conscience, to capacitate us for publick Service, what should hinder us, whilst we profess our selves of the same Faith, from subscribing it again, as oft as any valuable End can be serv'd by it?

WE are far from thinking that all the *Doctrinal Articles* of the Church are of equal Importance and Necessity with this particular one, tho' we are satisfy'd of their Truth, without which we had not subscrib'd them; yet few Truths are of that Importance, or so fully reveal'd in Scripture, as this *Grand Article*. This lies at the very Foundation of Christianity, and runs thorough the whole of it. How the requiring Persons to make a Declaration of their Faith in these Points narrows this Foundation, or why a Christian Government in their authori-
zing

zing Ministers in a Christian Church, may not demand to be some way satisfy'd concerning their Belief of that, without which they are not Christians, we apprehend not.

We can by no means understand what our Brethren mean by these Words [To restrain that Latitude of Expression in which our great Legislator hath seen fit to deliver his Will to us]. What have the Scriptures, in such Places that are purely Doctrinal or contain Rules of Duty, in determinate Sense or more Senses than one? May this Person take them in One Sense, Another in another, a Third in a Sense contrary to both, and yet All understand the Mind, and comply with the Will of the great Legislator? We have always thought, that the Sense of Scripture in Things of this Nature is but One, and that our Business is seriously to find it out; and we cannot imagine that it takes such a Compals and Latitude, that various Persons tho' widely differing in their Interpretations of one and the same Place, may have every one of them the Sense intended by the great Legislator. To conclude our Reflections on this Particular, we cannot but be of Opinion that the abovemention'd Clause is of dangerous import.

VI REASON.

WE did not think fit, to pay such a new and unwarrantable Regard to the Catechism of the Assembly of Divines: It being what they themselves have, in Effect, declared against; and we fear many pious Christians will be less ready to make the proper Use of this Compendium, when they see such Colour given for its standing in the Place of the Word of God.

OBSER-

OBSE RVATION.

We cannot but declare our Esteem of the **ASSEMBLIES Catechism**, as one of the most excellent Summaries of the Christian Religion that the Church of God in these latter Ages hath been blessed with; yet as we have said before concerning the Doctrinal Articles of the *Establish'd Church*, so we must here observe, that all that is delivered in the *Assemblies Catechism* is not of equal Importance to what is contained in the *Answers* which we have subscrib'd; nor are we sensible we have paid an *unwarrantable* regard to it, or such as the *Assembly themselves* in effect have declar'd against. Is it to be suppos'd they would draw up and publish that which they did not believe? or inscribe and present as *their humble Advice* to both Houses of Parliament, with the Proofs thereof out of the *Scriptures*, and yet have scrupled a Subscription to it, or discourage any from doing the like?

If we believe that their Explication is the *real Sense* of Scripture, what should hinder our declaring as much by subscribing? And this is all that in *just Construction* such a Fact amounts to. Does this give any Colour, as tho' we made it to stand in the Place of God's holy Word? We declare that we receive this Article, because we apprehend it to be the *very Doctrine* revealed in the *Scriptures*. Of what use are *Catechisms*, or how can we or our Brethren recommend them as *great Helps* to understand the *Mind of God*, if after we have compared them with the Word of God, and finding a *true Agreement*, we may not declare the same?

As we are far from setting any human Compositions upon a Level with the holy Scriptures, so
neither

neither dare we lay a *Temptation* before any, to slight or neglect what we believe agreeable thereto.

VII REASON.

WE take it to be an inverting the Great Rule of *deciding Controversies among Protestants*: Making the *Explications and Words of Men* determine the *Sense of Scripture*, instead of making the *Scriptures* to determine how far the *Words of Men* are to be regarded. We therefore, could not give our Hands to do that, which, in present Circumstances, would be like to mislead others to set up *Humane Explications* for the *Decisive Rule* of Faith. We then did, and do now judge it our Duty to remonstrate against such a Precedent, as opening a Way to (what we dread) the most fatal Breaches on *Gospel Liberty*.

OBSERVATION.

THE Substance of this Reasoning we have had Occasion so often to speak to, that there is no need here of enlarging.

WE never did nor do in the least pretend to make the *Explications of Men* a Rule to determine the *Sense of Scripture*; but only make use of our own and other Mens Words, in expressing what we believe the Scripture, by all just and reasonable Rules of Interpretation, do's evidently determine to be its own Sense. And finding the *Explication* given in these Articles agreeable to the *Holy Scriptures*, we have declar'd thus much by subscribing them, leaving it still to others to judge for themselves. That this should be represented as an inverting the great Rule of *deciding Controversies among Protestants*, and misleading

leading others to set up human *Explinations* as a *decisive Rule of Faith*, is not a more injurious *Infirmation* than it is weak and groundless. And if we may not have the *Liberty* of declaring what we believe to be the determinate *Sense* of *Scripture*, according to the forementioned *Rules of Interpretation*, this will be opening a *Way* indeed to the most fatal *Breaches* on that *Gospel Liberty*, which they seem so much concern'd to preserve and defend.

VIII REASON.

THAT we would not charge our Brethren that requir'd our Subscription, with a Design which any of them do disclaim, yet to us it appear'd, and does still appear to have the Nature of *Imposition*; which has been the great Engine of Division among Christians from the Beginning, and has done unspeakable Mischief to the *Christian Church*.

OBSERVATION.

WE must in Justice to our selves deny there is any Thing in this Act of ours that has the Nature of *Imposition*. We cannot but judge it absurd to charge that with the Nature of *Imposition*, which was done by us with as much Freedom as any Declaration they have made themselves, and without any Methods of Compulsion upon others, but leaving every Man to his own Liberty.

IF we may not be allow'd the Freedom of declaring our own Faith in such Words as we think contain the Sense of Scripture, for the answering of valuable and sometimes necessary Ends, the Charge of *Imposition*, and of *Persecution* too, must unavoidably fall upon those that would abridge us of this Liberty.

REA-

IX REASON.

‘ WE thought it would be a Reproach upon us, to do any Thing that look’d like giving up our *Christian Liberty*, when others with so great *Strength of Argument* are pleading for it.

OBSERVATION.

WE rejoice as much as our *Brethren* can do to find *Christian Liberty* asserted, and set any where upon its *true Basis*. And seeing it is plain from the foregoing Head, that our *Declaration* had nothing in it of the *Nature of Imposition*, how can it bring us under the *Reproach* of doing that which looks like giving up our *Christian Liberty*? Notwithstanding this we may consistently with our own Principles, and with as great *Strength of Argument* plead for it as any others; unless it be thought impossible for any but *Antitrinitarians* to be the great *Patrons* of *Christian Liberty*. But if we may judge of them by former *Precedents*, we should be very loth to have ours lie at their *Mercy*.

X REASON.

‘ WE foresaw the Subscription insisted on would occasion *Reflections*, and become a *Mark of Distinction* set on those who should not subscribe: And we knew that several, who had the *same Faith and Opinions* concerning the *TRINITY*, with our *selves* and our *Brethren*, yet could not be satisfy’d to come into any *Humane Explications*.

OBSERVATION.

IT seems as if this were the *Reason* of some particular *Persons* only, and not of the whole
F Body

Body of those whom we separated from. For could *All* have been *satisfied* to subscribe, there would then have been no *Occasion* for *Reflections*, or any *Mark of Distinction* at all. This must have been form'd by those, who as to *themselves*, had no *Difficulty* of subscribing the Declaration, only they were willing to cover and *skreen* others that had, whom *they* say they *knew* to be of the same Faith with *themselves* and us. But how could they know this if *those* their *Brethren* had never declar'd themselves in any but *Scripture Words*, and were not satisfy'd to come into any *human Explications*?

By what we did, we only design'd to bear a free and open *Testimony* of our Faith in these *Fundamental Points*. We have Comfort in having done our *Duty*. And if this, in the *Consequence* of it, shall any way tend to detect those who are departed from this Faith, and bring them under *Disreputation*, it is what we cannot help. Our own just *Reputation* and *Usefulness*, but especially the *Interest of Truth* and the *Safety* of precious Souls, ought to be dearer to us than the temporal *Interest* or *Reputation* of any particular *Person* whatsoever. Should the *publick Disesteem* fall on their Side, it will be *accidental*; for in Case the generality of Christians, through our *Silence*, should be tainted with these Errors, we, and not *they*, must then fall under the *publick Reproach*. That the Infection has not yet so far prevail'd, as to secure those from *Reproach*, who shall deny or betray these Truths, is Matter of great *Thankfulness* to God, but no ground of *Blame* upon us.

XI REASON.

‘ WE could not but think it would highly
 ‘ reflect on *those among our selves*, who had been
 ‘ known often to declare against every Thing
 ‘ of this Nature.

OBSERVATION.

‘ THO’ we are against *all Imposition and Force*,
 yet we know of *none* that ever declar’d against
 a free and voluntary Subscription of what they
 believe to be the *real Sense* of Scripture, and to
 be as well express’d by Words of *other Men* as
 their own; especially when the doing this
 would better answer the good *Purposes* intended,
 than Words of their own framing.

XII REASON.

‘ WE observed the *Enemies* of the *Prote-*
 ‘ *stant Dissenters* to be great Encouragers and
 ‘ Approvers of such kind of Proceedings;
 ‘ and we have seen how many Ways they are
 ‘ ready to take Advantage of our Brethrens
 ‘ Subscription since.

‘ To add but one Thing more, We did
 ‘ not think it proper to subscribe, because if
 ‘ this Humour was *once* complied with, we
 ‘ could not tell *where* it would stop.

OBSERVATION.

THIS Reason is built upon a *false Supposition*,
 viz. That we are *Advocates* for *forc’d Subscrip-*
 ‘ *tions*; an *unkind Insinuation* that runs through
 most of their Reasonings, which we are sorry
 to observe.

WE make no question *many* who have but
 little Respect for us as *Dissenters*, may yet rejoice

to see us with them in the *Common Faith*, as to these Points. But we are not *conscious* we have done *any Thing* that they can encourage or approve of, as *Enemies of Protestant Dissenters*.

WE are sensible our *Common Enemies* rejoice in our unhappy *Divisions*, which our *Brethren* of the other Side, as well as we, ('tis hop'd) will lay to Heart. And it will become them seriously to inquire, whether their *non-subscribing* do's not give the *Enemies of our Faith* a much greater *Advantage* against us, than our *subscribing* can in any *equitable Construction* be suppos'd to do those of our *Liberty*?

As to what is added in the *Conclusion*, we can make our *solemn Appeal* to *their Lord* and *ours*, that it was not *Humour* but a *pressing Sense of Duty* that has acted us in *all* this *Affair*. And we *heartily* wish our *Brethren*, who profess to be of the *same Faith* with us, may be as little under the *Influence of Humour* on *their Side*, as we on *ours*.

No wise Man will refuse to do at present what with a *safe Conscience* he can, if it may answer any *considerable Design*, for fear of *future* and *merely imaginary Consequences*. What ground can there be to apprehend *unreasonable Subscriptions* should ever be insisted on by those who have as little *Inclination* as they have *Power* to impose them?

To conclude. The *Reader* will observe we have chiefly confined our selves to the *Reasonings* our *Brethren* have thought fit to *publish*, without saying *any Thing* that looks *severe*, except where we thought our selves bound, from a just *Dislike* of those *Principles* they seem to impute to us, and in *necessary Vindication* of our selves.

POST-

P O S T S C R I P T.

' W^E desire it may be more particularly re-
 ' marked, That in Our declining the *Subscrip-*
 ' *tion* propos'd to Us, we apprehend, We have
 ' taken a *more effectual* Course to prevent the
 ' Growth of *Errors* concerning the *Doctrine* of
 ' the *Trinity*, (Whether those of *Arius*, or any
 ' other,) than even Our Brethren who so ear-
 ' nestly insisted on it. May not the Method
 ' they have taken, tempt Men to question, Whe-
 ' ther the Scriptures be so *perfect a Rule of Faith*,
 ' as Protestants have all along represented them
 ' to be? and to conclude there must be some-
 ' thing wanting in *Scripture* Argument and Evi-
 ' dence, when We betake Ourselves to *Humane*
 ' *Declarations*, and dare not depend upon *Those*
 ' which are Unquestionably *Divine*? Will it
 ' not give great *Advantage* to the *Adversaries* of
 ' the *Scripture Doctrine*, when We are obliged
 ' to defend not only the *Doctrine itself*, but the
 ' *Humane Words* made necessary to explain it?
 ' It cannot be but new *Questions* will be start-
 ' ed, and New *Points* arise to be defended; all
 ' which would be *Difficulties* needlessly brought
 ' upon Ourselves, and create *Disputes* among
 ' those who embrace the *Truth*, and might
 ' join in supporting it.

' W^E would not treat the *Laws of God* with
 ' less Respect than is paid to *Those of Our*
 ' *Country*. When any *Form of Words* is prescri-
 ' bed by the *Legislature* as a *Test* or Declara-
 ' tion, no Men, or Number of Men, were ever
 ' allowed to put an *Explication* of Their own
 ' or Others, either instead of those Words, or
 ' together with them; nor do any presume to
 ' do it. Can the Words of *Humane Declarations*

* *ons* be trusted to answer the Purposes of Civil
 * Government ; and not those of God to answer
 * His ? especially where the Importance is so
 * vastly disproportionate ?
 * We cannot consent to what, in our Appre-
 * henfion, has such a Tendency, especially in the
 * present Circumstances, to narrow the Christian
 * and Protestant Liberty of the People ; and to
 * divert them from attending to *Practical Reli-*
 * *gion*. In some Points and some Cases we
 * may no doubt submit to *Legal Demands*, when
 * yet we ought by no Means to countenance it
 * where there is no Pretence of Authority : But
 * if we will bind Ourselves, to *Humane Decisi-*
 * *ons*, in the deepest Points of *Revelation*, as if
 * They were absolutely necessary to Communion ;
 * will not the natural Consequence be, the les-
 * sening of Peoples Regards to the *Words of God*,
 * and placing an undue Regard to the *Words of*
 * *Men* ? Nor should Men be led into *curious*
 * *Enquiries* about those Things, in which even
 * *Superior Capacities* lose themselves, and by
 * which the Minds of People will be taken off
 * from the plainer Truths and Duties of Reli-
 * gion. And what will *Truth* itself avail, if it
 * be not improved into *Holiness* ; or if it be
 * made Instrumental to destroy or abate that
 * *Charity*, which is the *Bond of Perfectness* and the
 * *fulfilling of the Law*.

O B S E R V A T I O N S.

THIS *Postscript* contains some *after Thoughts*,
 which we suppose they had overlooked in their
 foregoing *Reasons* ; which we think fit to con-
 sider.

IF what they apprehend, could be clearly made
 out, viz. That by declining the *Subscription*, they

took a more effectual Course to prevent the Growth of Error concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity, than we who made it; we confess this would to us be very extraordinary; but till they do, we are of Opinion it will be difficult to persuade any of the same Faith with us, of the Justice of this Apprehension.

WE wish we had been plainly told what these particular Errors concerning the Trinity are, they would in this way prevent the Growth of. For as we on the one hand cannot but reckon those in the New Scheme to have entertain'd dangerous Errors concerning this Doctrine, so they on the other side must judge the like of us. If our Brethren really think the Declaration we have sign'd does not contain the true Scripture Doctrine, then we own their Non-subscribing (as far as the Influence of their Example could reach) might hinder the Growth of this Error. But if it be the real Doctrine reveal'd in the Holy Scriptures, we must be very unhappy indeed, if our declaring it to be so should give such Prejudice to any, as to run them into the contrary Error. Does what we have subscribed contain any thing contrary to the Scripture Doctrine? For seeing they keep us in the dark, and will not let us know how they understand the Scriptures, we can't tell whose Interpretation they will reckon erroneous, and consequently what does tend either to prevent or to promote the Growth of Error concerning this Doctrine.

WE don't see how our declaring can tempt any to question the Scripture's being a perfect Rule of Faith, since we never in the least pretended to advance our Declaration as a Rule of Faith, and much less such a One as should stand in Competition with, or be an Addition to the Holy Scriptures.

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Can this Consequence flow from our subscribing it only as what *we believe* to be agreeable to the Scripture? If our Brethren think it *not agreeable* they will do well to *tell us*, and try if they can overthrow the Doctrine contained in it. We are persuaded it carries *nothing* in it but what has *Scripture Arguments* to support it. If this which they call a *Humane Declaration*, be the *very Doctrine* held forth in Scripture, why should these be deemed *inconsistent* with each other? Suppose *Ministers* in preaching deliver in their *own Words*, what they take to be the Doctrine of Scripture concerning this or any other *Material Point*, and are afterwards call'd upon to defend it, is it *reasonable* they should decline so doing, and only defend the *Words of Scripture*, but not their own *Explication*? Whereas if they *do believe* it to be agreeable to Scripture, and can *prove it so*; by the *same Means* they defend the *One*, they do the *Other*. If this been't allow'd, how can any be *prov'd* in an Error but *Antiscripturists*, who *deny* the Authority, and will not so much as own the *bare Words* of Scripture?

OUR Brethren make frequent mention of the Word TEST, without letting us know what they *mean* by it. We are certain it is *no Scripture Word*. We never pretended that any particular *Form of Humane Words* ought to be a TEST *opposite* to, or *contradistinct* from divine Revelation; or that none are *sound* in the Faith, who do not *subscribe* such or such *individual Words*. We know there are *several ways* of expressing the *same Doctrinal Truth*; and if we are but *satisfy'd* that Persons do *really understand*, and not *pervert the Sense* of the *Holy Ghost* in Scripture, we are *willing* they should enjoy the Liberty

ty of using *their own Words*, and have declared the same upon this Occasion, tho' at *some Seasons* we think it would be of *much more publick Service*, could we agree to speak the *same things* in the *same Words*.

WE believe that the great GOD in his Revelation, and especially in the *Laws* of it, speaks as *intelligibly* as Men do in *theirs*. They are directed to *reasonable Creatures*, with design they should be *understood*; and GOD has given them a *Capacity*, so to express in *Words of their own*, what they apprehend to be *his Mind*, as that *others* should be sensible they do.

YET if, notwithstanding the *Plainness* of *Humane Laws*, it is found *necessary* there should be those, whose *Profession* it is to *interpret* and *explain* them, why should we think the *Doctrine* and *Laws* of *Divine Revelation*, to be such as *supercede* any manner of *Explication*? especially when GOD has seen fit to appoint a certain *Order* of Men for this *very End* and *Purpose*? As he would be reckoned but a *mean Lawyer*, who when his *Judgment* is ask'd concerning the *Sense* and *Meaning* of a *particular Law*, shall in answer, only read to you *the Words* of it: So he would be reckon'd no *profound Divine*, who when desir'd to give his *Sense* of a *particular Scripture*, should only refer you to the *Text itself*, without any manner of *Explication*. If by subscribing we presume to no more than *declare* what we take to be the *Sense* of *Scripture*, how by this do we *derogate* from the *Perfection* or *Perspicuity* of it? For tho' GOD has seen it *necessary* to appoint some to *assist* us in finding out the *true Sense* of *Scripture*, this is *not* because of the *Obscurity* of the

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Scriptures,

Scriptures, but of the *Corruption* and *Weakness* of those who are to receive *Instruction* from them.

'Tis insinuated as if their subscribing would have tended, to *narrow the Christian and Protestant Liberty of the People*, and to *divert them from attending to practical Religion*; and yet at the same Time 'tis acknowledged, that in some Cases we may undoubtedly submit to *legal Demands*. Now if our subscribing the *first Article* of the *Church of England* has this *fatal Tendency*, we think that no *legal Demand* or *Pretence of Humane Authority* could have justified us in doing it. If it had no such Tendency, as we think it has not, then there is *much less Appearance* of that now, when it is *freely* done without any such Demand.

WE know of none among us that bind themselves to *mere human Decisions* in the *deepest Points of Revelation*; unless declaring *freely* what we are *convinc'd* is the *Sense of Scripture*, be call'd a *human Decision*: nor have we made it *absolutely necessary* to *Communion*, that others should declare their Faith in *our Words*; provided we be *satisfied* in any *reasonable way*, that in these *grand Points* they are of the *same Mind* with us. How can the endeavouring to understand the *Scriptures* our selves, and affording others the *best help* we can in their doing the same, be interpreted, *lessening the Peoples Regard to the Word of GOD*, and *placing an undue Regard to the Words of Men*?

WE would be informed whether the *Doctrine* of the ever Blessed *Trinity* be not one of those important *Doctrines*, which it is *absolutely necessary* for *private Christians* to know

know and believe. If it be, what *curious Inquiries* about it does *our Declaration* contain, that makes them *afraid* to subscribe it? We thought it contained the *plain Scripture Doctrine*, without meddling with the *niceties* and *subtilties* of *Schoolmen*, and others. The representing the *first Article* of the *Church of England*, and the *Answers* in the *Catechism* as *curious Inquiries*, and as tending to *take off* the *Minds* of *People* from the *plain Truths* and *Duties* of *Religion*, looks as if *our Brethren* did dislike the *Matter* of the *Declaration* *it self*, as well as object against the *Prudence* and *Seasonableness* of subscribing it; and then 'tis to be *feared* we differ about the *Substance* and *Importance* of the *Doctrine*, and not *merely* about *human Declarations*.

WE are as *fully* persuaded as *any* can be, that *Truth* without *Holiness* and *Charity* will avail *nothing*; and yet we are as certain, that *Truth*, and *this Truth* in particular has a *necessary* Influence upon *both the other*; for this is a chief *Article* of the *Mystery* of *Godliness*; and *that Holiness* and *Charity* can never be truly *Evangelical*, which do's not flow from *Faith* *unfeigned*.

THUS we have been *constrained* to give a *true and faithful Account* of our own *Conduct*, together with some *Observations* upon the *Reasonings* of *our Brethren*. We can truly say our *Aim*, in all, is as *faithful Ministers* to preserve the *Truth* we are *intrusted with* of the *Lord*, and to transmit it down *pure* to our *Posterity*, as by the *gracious Providence* of *GOD* we have

have been blessed with the Receipt of it from our pious Ancestors. We follow all with an earnest Prayer to GOD, that we may see Peace and Truth in our Day, and be effectually directed to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.

FINIS

ERRATA

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| 6. | 16. | for may read made. |
| 13. | 15. | after bold read the. |
| 14. | 1. | after with read such. |
| 16. | 24. | for this read their. |
| 17. | 25. | for of read between. |

